DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 141 961 EA 009 863

AUTHOR Fredrickson, John H.
TITLE The Open Plan: A Blueprint for Success.
PUB DATE Sep 77
NOTE 6p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Responsibility; Elementary Secondary Education; *Open Plan Schools; *Principals; *School Environment; *Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

The successful utilization of open plan schools requires a genuine commitment to an educational format that stresses student initiative and responsibility, backed by funding for staff development. Teachers need support from administrators, board members, and parents; aid in developing both a philosophy and rationale for their approach; workshops where they can learn about teaching materials and develop curriculum ideas; and time to share these things with fellow teachers. If these conditions are met, and a creative principal is assigned as educational leader, the open plan school will be a success. (Author/MLP)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED141961

September, 1977

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

THE OPEN PLAN: A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

By

DR. JOHN H. FREDRICKSON
School Facilities Consultant
Middleton, Wisconsin

Like most innovations, the step to an open plan school, with all its ramifications for planning and coordinating, is not an easy one. Curriculum development and implementation are monumental tasks indeed. And working with teachers, paraprofessionals and aides in sustaining a comprehensive program which meets the needs of each child takes dedication, perseverance and teamwork. But the open plan school, when thoughtfully designed, properly staffed, and confidently run, is the keystone in moving toward the realization of an educational format that truly serves each individual boy and girl.

Communication

Communication is the primary mechanism for making an open plan school function effectively. There must be free exchange of ideas between the staff and principal and among staff members themselves. Every person must feel free to communicate with every other person. Each must be encouraged to express his or her feelings, and to exchange viewpoints without fear of censure or reprisal. Every member of the educational enterprise must be receptive to ideas from within and without that might improve the quality of the operation-at-large. When communication stops, so too does open education.

Teachers

Open plan schools require a unique kind of teacher - one who is both willing and able to meet the challenge of the "wall-less" environment. Teaching is no longer a "solo" performance, one of simply instructing. The teacher must be able to suggest various paths of learn-

EA 009 863

ing to the individual pupil and to guide him on them. While teachers may not need to carry as many solid facts around in their heads, they must work harder from day to day to keep students stimulated, directed, and occupied.

Open plan teachers must enjoy youngsters and get to know and understand them -- know how to group or pair them so they can help one another, know how to recognize problems that interfere with their learning and correct them -- and do all of this on an individual basis. Teachers must have the ability to generate curiosity in the learner, a curiosity that will lead him or her to deeper understandings, clearer meanings, and a real desire to continue learning.

Openness

Openness, that constant visibility of the open plan school, in the hands of a master teacher can produce an even higher level of teaching performance. Teachers, both new and experienced, can increase their effectiveness more quickly in the open plan than in the self-contained classroom. They are constantly learning new or more sophisticated teaching strategies, acquiring new ideas from watching their teammates, and demonstrating their own successful techniques to others sharing the same area.

Teacher Aides

To permit teachers to spend as much time as possible teaching and working with individual pupils, differentiated staffing is invaluable for open plan education. Teams are sometimes given the choice of an additional teacher or a number of teacher aides, and they often opt for more aides. With such assistance available, teachers can be spared many routine tasks. Among these are correcting test papers, duplicating learning materials, and keeping records up-to-date. The use of non-certified personnel allows teachers to concentrate on teaching.

Motivation

Generally, there are fewer serious discipline problems in open plan schools, because students seem to like where they are and what they are doing. Most accept and enjoy the self-directed responsibility. They are pleased to be treated more like adults. And they delight in independent discovery and take pleasure in doing things for themselves. Indeed, the desire to share and the cooperative spirit engendered when students tell one another about some new concept or bit of knowledge add real satisfaction to the entire process. Students truly appreciate being participants in their own education, rather than the spectators they have been too often in the past.

Students

A close relationship between the student and teacher is paramount. No one expects the young learner to function entirely independently, and no one expects students to come to school equipped with enough sound judgment to make all of the important choices in their learning careers. Therefore, the teacher-student conference, where he is helped to understand his strengths and weaknesses, is vital. The teacher must be frank and honest in discussing the student's achievements and shortcomings, and insist that he or she does also. A major component of the student's learning process is to understand himself and to make sound decisions about himself. Unlike traditional settings, where he or she has been evaluated in terms of competition with others, the teacher must assist him to evaluate himself in terms of his own capabilities.

Caution

It would be a serious overstatement, however, to contend that open plan education is the answer for every student or for every teacher. There are, in fact, youngsters who get "lost" in the open plan - who cannot learn effectively in an open environment. Because of this,

school districts with open plan educational formats should also make some provision for more traditional programs. When a student appears uncomfortable in an open plan situation and is definitely not gaining from the experience, adjustments should be made to provide him or her with a modified program or to enroll him or her in a different educational environment altogether.

This is also true for staff members. There should be no shame in not wanting to teach in an open plan school, and no one should be made to feel that there is. If a teacher prefers to teach in more traditional surroundings, he or she should have the opportunity to be reassigned to another school in the district.

The Principal

No person contributes more to the success or to the failure of an open plan school than does the principal. Hopefully, he or she and key members of the teaching staff have been involved in the creation or renovation of the facilities and are, therefore, intimately acquainted with the entire project. In any event, the principal's total immersion in the school's program should serve as the catalyst for its effective operation. More than any other person, the principal should be a positive guiding influence.

As such an influence, the principal should actively assist new teachers in their orientation to the school and to their assignments. Because he or she controls the overall climate of the school, the principal must assist staff members, students, parents, and the community to understand and to support the open plan program. His or her assurance, skill and belief in the philosophy and goals of open plan education can give much to the new or experienced teacher joining the staff, to the student not used to making decisions, to questioning parents, and to the wary public.

The organizational structure of an open plan school should create a cooperative spirit among all staff members in the planning, implementing and evaluating of the educational program. But it is the principal who must constantly assess what is happening and skillfully direct the overall operation. When he or she senses defects or the need for change, he must alert the entire staff and then work cooperatively with it to bring about that change. Open communication can make the critical difference.

Conclusions

The purpose behind open plan schools is not just academic but social and psychological as well. And the idea is for each open plan school to develop its own personality and atmosphere in order to strengthen social relationships, encourage a sense of identity, and engender the kind of teacher-student loyalty which helps students to truly achieve in school.

If school districts do not have a genuine commitment to an educational format that stresses student initiative and responsibility, backed by funding for staff development, they should avoid open plan education. If commitment does exist, teachers must be given real encouragement. They need support from administrators, board members and parents; aid in developing both a philosophy and rationale for their approach; workshops where they can learn about teaching materials and develop curriculum ideas; and time to share these things with fellow teachers. If these conditions are met and a creative principal is assigned as educational leader, the "open plan" will indeed be a "blueprint for success."